

# The harambee self-help movement in Kenya : a social anthropological study among the Kamba of Kitui District

**By**

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This thesis examines the social organization of the 'Harambee' self-help movement in Kenya. Research was based on extended fieldwork among the Kamba (or Akamba) people in Kitui District in eastern Kenya. Social anthropological methods were used, centering on one village community in Kitui. Additional research data included surveys of village self-help groups and Harambee secondary schools in Kitui, colonial archive records and contemporary material on the first decade of the Harambee movement. The Harambee movement was found to derive from two sources: reforms of colonial forced labour, and traditional community work party institutions. Historical material on colonial forced labour and on the growth of Community Development in late colonial Kenya is set out as

background to the Harambee movement after Independence (1963), particularly as it developed in Kitui. The different kinds of Kamba work parties, particularly the neighborhood mwethya, are described. Further ethnographic data on Kitui society and culture is presented as relevant. This includes fieldwork material on kinship, the economy, socialization and education, leadership and community cooperation, beliefs and ritual, and law. The structure and activities of the village self-help group, also called mwethya, are examined in detail. Harambee schools in Kitui are the subject of particular study, with details of church management, fundraising and students, and a case study of one particular school. In the concluding chapter, work parties and self-help groups are compared. The forms of reciprocity in each are analysed in respect of the transactions and social relationships involved. Self-help activities were found to combine 'balanced reciprocity. Based on equalized contributions and targeted returns, and 'generalized reciprocity. Derived from community commitments. Traditional institutions of community

cooperation provided the pre-conditions of the modern self-help movement. Finally, the Harambee movement is reviewed in terms of Community Development principles, political processes, social stratification, and development planning.

**keywords:**

[Fund raising](#) / [Social life and customs](#) / [Community development](#) / [Cooperation](#) / [Development economics](#) / [Grass roots movement](#)

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